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History of      ◉      ◉      ◉  
Mt. Vernon Place Church



Washington, D. C.

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*Errata*—Page 6, James C. McKelden should be John. Page 9, Matthew G. Emery, last Mayor of Washington, inadvertently got mixed with the ministers. Page 15, Rippley should be Rippey. Rev. J. L. Moreland should be added to the Assistant Pastors.







*Historical Sketch*  
OF  
MOUNT VERNON PLACE  
CHURCH  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

WITH A FULL LIST OF PASTORS  
SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH  
IN 1850  
AND ANECDOTES OF SOME EARLY FAMILIES  
1850 - 1939

*by*  
WILLIAM ALEXANDER MILLER  
*In Collaboration With His Cousin*  
EDNA FOLLIN STEELY  
*Daughter of the Late John Madison Follin*  
*Member Since 1866*  
*Recording Steward of the Church for Many Years*


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# History of Mt. Vernon Place Church



Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church got its name from Mount Vernon Place. The Place, in turn, got its name from the home of President Washington. Mount Vernon was so named by Lawrence Washington, brother of George, and its owner. He had served in the British Navy with Admiral Vernon in the British expedition against the Spanish forts Porto Bello and Cartagena in the West Indies.

Admiral Edward Vernon lived from 1684 until 1757. He entered the British Navy in 1701, and served in the War of the Spanish Succession from 1701 until 1713. He entered Parliament in 1722. He bombarded and took Porto Bello in 1739, and was repulsed at Cartagena in 1741. Porto Bello is on the Isthmus of Panama, 20 miles from Colon. Its bay was discovered by Columbus in 1502. Every year, a Spanish fleet came to Porto Bello, and was laden with rich treasures from Peru. It was sacked by Parker, a British captain, in 1602; by the pirate Morgan in 1668, and by other pirates in 1679. It is now a small village.

Cartagena is a seaport of Colombia. It was founded by the Spaniards in 1533, and was long the principal port and stronghold of Spanish America. It was sacked several times by pirates. In the 18th century, it was fortified by the Spaniards at a cost of \$59,000,000.00. It was the first New Granadian city to declare its independence of Spain, but it was captured by the Spaniards in 1815, after a four months' siege, in which nearly all of the inhabitants and garrison perished. Celebrated artists say that there is to be seen one of the most beautiful views in the world.



Kindly notice how a single relationship runs through the Church during its 89 years.

My first wife, whose name was Mamie Edmonston, had been a member of Mount Vernon Place Church Sunday School, in the late Miss Annie Walker's infant class, early in the '70's, up through the grades, until her death in 1926. I was baptized in Mount Vernon Place Church in the '80's. Those were the days in which Mr. Fred Stier was the popular Superintendent of the Sunday School.

My first wife and I were married in Mount Vernon Place Church, in 1889, by the pastor, Reverend S. W. Haddaway, who was also Chaplain of the House of Representatives.

My first wife was a teacher in the Chinese Sunday School of Mount Vernon Place Church, and retained her connection in that capacity until her death. The Chinese boys attended her funeral.

When the little organization, now known as Mount Vernon Place Church, had a frame building in 1850, 89 years ago, on the site now occupied by the Hebrew Synagogue on Eighth Street, between H and I, my wife's grandfather, Nathan Edmonston, and his wife, Rebecca Follin, lived one block west of the church, on Ninth Street. Their son, Gabriel Edmonston, who was my wife's father, sang in the choir of Mount Vernon Place Church in the early '70's.

Mrs. Edmonston's daughter, Mrs. Richard J. Beall, and her six children were members, and attended the Sunday School in the early '70's. Mrs. Edmonston's nephew, Mr. John M. Follin, and several relatives were members of the M Street Church, the predecessor of Mount Vernon Place Church, before 1869. Mr. Follin's wife and six children also attended the Sunday School and church.



Mrs. Nathan Edmonston's daughter, Mrs. Beall, and her nephew, Mr. John M. Follin, marched with the congregation from the M Street Church in 1869 to the Mount Vernon Place Church on Ninth Street.

Gabriel Edmonston's first wife (his cousin) was Mary Follin, and they were my wife's parents. Mr. Edmonston courted his second wife, Mary Barker, in Mount Vernon Place Church, and they were married in the church in 1875 by the pastor, Rev. Alpheus W. Wilson, afterward Bishop Wilson. Mary Barker, who thus became my first wife's step-mother, was a daughter of James W. Barker.

James W. Barker was a native of Middleburg, Va. He was a member of the original Board of Trustees of Mount Vernon Place Church; member of the committee who purchased the ground for the church at the northeast corner of Ninth and Mount Vernon Place, and also a member of the Building Committee when the brick church was erected at that location. He was a prominent builder at the time, and had erected many buildings of the city. He was successful in his vocation, and owned a number of houses. He owned all of the houses on H Street, from St. Paul's Church to Twelfth Street, and other houses in different parts of the city. Mr. Barker's son, Dr. Howard Barker, married Miss Fannie Wilson, a daughter of Jesse B. Wilson, who was also a member of the original Board of Trustees; of the committee who purchased the ground, and of the committee who had charge of the building of the brick church. Dr. Barker later was President of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia.

I recall when Mrs. Nellie Shircliff, daughter of Jesse B. Wilson, sang beautiful solos at the funerals of both James W. Barker and Mrs. Barker at their residence on H Street.



Jesse B. Wilson was a very prosperous citizen. He was President of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company for seventeen years, and a director of that company for twenty years. He had been President of the Northern Liberties Market Company. The market was on the east half of the square now occupied by the Carnegie Library, opposite to the Mount Vernon Place brick church. He was also one of the organizers and President of the Lincoln National Bank. His home for many years was at 429 Sixth Street, between D and E Streets, Northwest. He later built a fine residence on Eighteenth Street, at the top of the hill. With other property of which he was the possessor he built and owned the Saks Building, now Kann's, near the corner of Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. He was Treasurer of Mount Vernon Church for many years.

When the church was on Eighth Street, between H and I, eight prominent members of the Virginia Conference were assigned as pastors to that charge, as follows:

1850 W. W. Bennett.

1851 Leonidas Rosser, one of the great revivalists of the church.

1852 John D. Blackwell.

1853-4 James A. Duncan, the silver tongued preacher.

1855-6 David S. Doggett, who became Bishop and presided over the Baltimore Conference.

1857-8 John C. Granberry, whom all loved as Bishop.

1859-60 Joseph A. Proctor.

1861 George H. Ray was appointed, but on account of the breaking out of the War he was unable to fill the place.

The Church itself has no record of the first eight pastors.

On June 25, 1851, Lund Washington, Robert Downing and Charles L. Coltman, Trustees of the Central Pres-



byterian Church, agreed with the following named Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to sell them the Eighth Street church property for \$3,630:

Charles A. Davis  
Alpheus Edwards  
Jackson Edmonston  
Joseph Melvin

Butler Baker  
James T. Crump  
William S. Clay  
Francis A. Tucker

Jackson Edmonston, of the Trustees, was a cousin of my father-in-law, Gabriel Edmonston.

During the Civil War, the Eighth Street Church was taken over by the Government and used as a hospital.

In 1862, those of the congregation who had stuck together occupied, for a time, as a place of worship, a small frame building on the north side of P Street, between Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets.

In 1863 the congregation erected a frame building on the north side of M Street, near Tenth, on the lot formerly occupied by the home of Senator James K. Jones, of Arkansas, where they were served by supplies from Columbian College on University Place, now George Washington University, through the courtesy of its President, and by the Rev. John Wesley Boteler, a member of the church who was also a member of the Baltimore Conference. I have seen all of the homes of the organization now known as Mount Vernon Place Church.

That noble preacher, Rev. William V. Tudor, came in 1865 from Cambridge, Maryland. I heard him preach several times, and have dined with him on numerous occasions.

At the first meeting of the Baltimore Conference after the Civil War, held in Alexandria, Virginia, in February, 1866, the Conference joined the Methodist Episcopal



Church, South, and Rev. W. V. Tudor was sent as pastor, and was returned for the years 1867, '68, '69 and '70. It is a mistake to say the church was founded by Doctor Tudor. It was founded years before; he being really its ninth pastor. He merely changed its name.

April 18, 1868, a committee composed of the following named six members purchased the ground at the northeast corner of Ninth and Mount Vernon Place from Joseph D. Green and wife:

James C. McKelden  
Francis A. Lutz  
James W. Barker

Samuel T. G. Morsell  
Jesse B. Wilson  
George T. Dearing

I was acquainted with all of them.

The Building Committee for the brick church on Ninth Street was composed of the following named members:

John C. McKelden

George T. Dearing

Samuel T. G. Morsell

James W. Barker

Jesse B. Wilson

The brick church was erected, and would seat about 800 people. On Sunday, June 13, 1869, the congregation met at the frame church on M Street and marched in a body of about 150 to the new church.

The pastors of the brick church, succeeding the Rev. William V. Tudor, were as follows:

1871-3 S. S. Roszell, D.D., assisted for the first year by the Rev. John Hannon, who afterward transferred to the Virginia Conference. The assistant for the second year was the Rev. John A. Kern, who afterward was in the teaching corps of Randolph-Macon and Vanderbilt Universities.



1873-77 Alpheus W. Wilson, D.D. The pastor became sick and, in 1875, had as an assistant Rev. Embrey E. Hoss, and the Rev. I. R. Finley in 1878. Both Mr. Wilson and Mr. Hoss were elected bishops.

1878-82 W. P. Harrison, D.D.

1882-86 S. K. Cox, D.D., who relieved the church of debt. Under his pastorate Epworth was founded.

1886-90 S. W. Haddaway. In his term, Marvin was founded.

1890-93 J. T. Wightman.

1893-97 Isaac W. Canter. In his term, Calvary was founded.

1897-01 J. W. Duffey, D.D.

1901-05 Forest J. Prettyman, D.D. St. Paul's was founded.

1905-08 William F. Locke. In the first year of Mr. Locke's pastorate the idea was conceived for a representative M. E. Church, South.

1908-12 J. G. Wells, D.D.

1912-13 E. V. Regester, D.D.

1913-18 Edwin King Hardin, D.D. The representative church was begun and practically completed during his pastorate.

I heard all the above pastors preach, except Dr. Roszell.

November 23, 1869, the committee who purchased the ground for the brick church deeded the lot and the new church to the following named trustees:

Israel Deming

George T. Dearing

Samuel T. G. Morsell

Henry C. Windsor

James W. Barker

Jesse B. Wilson

Henry F. Zimmerman

Francis A. Lutz



I am able to give the years when four old members of the brick church joined:

Miss M. E. Webster—1864. J. T. Petty—1867. The  
Mrs. Fannie Harper—1865. latter was Auditor of the  
John M. Follin—1866. District for many years.  
I knew all of them.

The various names of the present church organization have been as follows:

1850—the Eighth Street church, “Methodist Episcopal Church, South”.

1866—on M Street, “First Congregational Methodist”.

1869—“Mount Vernon Place Episcopal Methodist”.

1886—“Mount Vernon Place Methodist Episcopal Church, South”.

The long name came on February 23, 1886, when the surviving members of the Board of Trustees deeded the property to themselves as Trustees of the Mount Vernon Place Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as follows:

Israel Deming	Samuel T. G. Morsell
George T. Dearing	James W. Barker
Jesse B. Wilson	

I distinctly recall Dr. Tudor and Mr. Barker telling about the time when the new church at the northeast corner of Ninth and Mount Vernon Place was completed in 1869, and the congregation met at the frame church on M Street and marched in a body to the new church for the first Sunday service on June 13, 1869.

It was the intention to have the dedication at the morning services, but as they were so long, it was postponed until evening. In the morning, the church was crowded and it was necessary to bring extra seats. The services were opened by the choir singing a dedicatory anthem composed by Mr. John W. Alby, of Baltimore.



Scripture selections were read by Rev. Samuel Kepler. Rev. Mr. Sargent, of Baltimore, read the hymn "Behold Thy Temple, God of Grace", after which it was sung by the choir. Rev. Samuel Regester, presiding elder of the Baltimore district, led in prayer, and was followed by the choir in singing the anthem "Let All the World Keep Silence". Rev. Dr. W. E. Munsey, Missionary Secretary, announced the text: Genesis, chapter 2, 7th verse: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul", from which he delivered an eloquent sermon.

Rev. W. V. Tudor, the pastor, announced that a collection would be taken. He made a few remarks on the financial condition of the church, and then appointed the canvassers. About \$3,500 was raised. Four persons contributed \$500 each: James W. Barker, Jesse B. Wilson, Samuel T. G. Morsell, and a friend. Rev. Mr. Cooper, of Georgetown, pronounced the benediction.

Among other clergymen present were: Parrish, Holland, A. W. Wilson, John Ball, of Baltimore, and John I. Pasco, of Lynchburg, Virginia. The choir was led by Prof. J. H. Daniel, and Mr. J. H. Bradley presided at the organ. I well remember the last two gentlemen.

At 3 o'clock another service was held, and clergymen present, in addition to those at the morning service, were: Rev. Dr. George W. Samson, President of Columbian College, now George Washington University; Rev. Matthew G. Emery, J. G. Henning, Weideman and J. G. Butler. Rev. Alpheus W. Wilson delivered the sermon from "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

In the evening, a dedicatory service was conducted by Rev. Dr. Tudor, the pastor. Rev. Mr. Holland, of Balti-



more, delivered the sermon from the text "For the things done in his body according as he hath done, whether it be good or bad." II Corinthians, verse 10.

The builders of the brick church were Samuel T. G. Morsell and George T. Dearing, a firm of well-known builders, and both members of the church.

Mrs. James W. Barker was the daughter of Jacob Hines, who was an early resident of Washington. On the wall of the Barker home were two large portraits, one of Mrs. Barker's father, Jacob Hines, and the other of his brother, Christian Hines.

Jacob and Christian Hines were sons of John Hines, or Johannes Heintz. The father came from Switzerland, though he had been born in Dillenburg, Prussia. He went to Switzerland again and returned with what were probably the first cases of guns for use by the Americans in the Revolution.

The Hines brothers had been born at Liberty, Maryland, Jacob in 1778, and Christian in 1781. They died in Washington, within three days of each other, in 1874. Jacob was 97 and Christian 94 years of age.

Christian Hines was a spectator in the House gallery when Congress met in Washington for the first time. He saw all of the presidents from Washington to and including Grant, eighteen in number. He shook hands with all but Grant.

Christian Hines and his brother Matthew, in 1828, purchased from Dr. William Thornton, architect of the Capitol, the plantation called "Mount Pleasant." Dr. Thornton, the successful contestant of the fourteen who submitted plans for the Capitol, had been a physician in Tortola, West Indies. The "Mount Pleasant" tract consisted of 56½ acres, and was located approximately where



Columbia and Kalorama Roads are now, and just south of Belmont Street. It was part of an old grant from the British Crown. The house erected in 1828 by the Hines brothers was of a bungalow type, of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  stories, and about 25 feet square. The house stood until about the '80's. Its site is now occupied by the Belmont apartment house. The fruit trees in the yard bore fruit until 1915. In that year, I took several photos of them for my old friend, John Clagett Proctor.

In the '80's, I frequently took Mrs. James W. Barker out carriage riding to old "Mount Pleasant", the home of her two uncles. She was then advanced in years, and often referred to the many good times she had had there in her girlhood.

The Hines plantation of "Mount Pleasant" gave name to the Mount Pleasant section of the city of Washington. Several fanciful assertions to the contrary notwithstanding.

Christian Hines, the brother of the father of Mrs. Barker, was the author of the rarest book on the history of the city of Washington. It is entitled "Early Recollections of the City of Washington". I have a copy. The author lies in an unmarked grave in Rock Creek Cemetery. How appropriate if the Columbia Historical Society should erect a marker at his grave, in Lot 43, Section A, near the church.

During the years that James W. Barker was director of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company (he was a director for twenty-one years), we were invited to watch the big parades on Pennsylvania Avenue from the second story of the "Marble Building", at the southwest corner of Ninth and Pennsylvania Avenue. That was the headquarters of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company for many years.

I well remember the inaugural parade of President



Harrison, in 1889. The rain poured all day, and all that we saw from our vantage point was a sea of the tops of bobbing umbrellas from morning until night.

The story goes that one day Dr. Tudor and Noble D. Larner were standing near the excavation for the brick church and Mr. Larner remarked that the new church would face Mount Vernon Place. Dr. Tudor was quick to see the desirability of that as the name of the new church. The church got its name from Mount Vernon Place, the street only two blocks long, running from Seventh to Ninth, on the north side of Mount Vernon Square, and which street the church now faces.

It is an error to say that the church got its name from Mount Vernon Square. When the church was built in 1869, the present double square known as Mount Vernon Square was two separate squares. The east square, from Seventh to Eighth, was occupied by the Northern Liberty Market. At that time, Eighth Street ran straight through, while the west square, from Eighth to Ninth, was designated on the official map of 1870 as vacant Government land, without name.

The District Surveyor's Office informs me that an official plat of survey by that office, in 1899, has the double square designated "Reservation 8, Mount Vernon Square", and is so marked in a book entitled "Book of Maps Under Federal Jurisdiction", compiled by direction of the Secretary of War, in 1915. The Surveyor adds that many old records show that designation.

I am informed by the Office of Superintendent of National Parks, under whose jurisdiction the square comes, that it is their opinion that the designation as "Mount Vernon Square" dates from the original acquisition of the land in 1791. They say that reports as early as 1840 so



refer to it, and that the earliest mention of Northern Liberties Market gives it as built in "Mount Vernon Square."

Years ago, when they were considering the location for the monumental representative church, Bishop Alpheus W. Wilson was chairman of the committee. I remember sending to him a list of reasons for selecting the present site of Mount Vernon Place Church. One of my reasons was that the location was one of the few ideal pivotal points in the city, similar to that of the Lutheran Church at Thomas Circle. I made a drawing of the neighborhood of the suggested site in connection with the street railroads, and showing its great accessibility. I have the Bishop's letter of 1906, thanking me.

The committee who purchased the ground were:

W. W. Millan

D. L. Coon

The local committee to act with the General Conference Committee was composed of the following members of the church:

W. W. Millan, Chairman

John M. Follin

Charles J. Ziegler, Vice Chairman

Clarendon Smith

Lovick Pierce, Secretary

Henry G. Thomas

J. Everett Baird, Treasurer

W. V. Boyle

I knew all of them.

The Board of Trustees when the present church was dedicated consisted of the following members:

W. W. Millan, Chairman

J. E. Baird

J. M. Follin, Secretary

There is before me a copy of the program for the dedication service of the present church in 1926. I see the name of John Follin, Secretary of the Board of Trustees.



member of the Board of Stewards, member of the local committee who selected the site, and of the Committee of Welcome. His full name was John Madison Follin, and he was a brother of my wife's mother. He was active in the church since 1866 until his death in 1930. In the same program, I see the name of Mrs. C. M. Stoy, President of the Woman's Missionary Society. She is a second cousin of my wife. Her husband was Treasurer of the Church for some years. My first wife's step-mother, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins have been members of Mount Vernon Place Church throughout the years, from 1850.

In 1909, Dr. George S. Sexton was chosen by the General Conference Committee to have charge of the enterprise for a new church. For ten years, he traveled throughout the southern states, collecting money. The cornerstone was laid on October 7, 1917, by Bishop W. A. Candler, D.D. Though the new church was occupied June 13, 1919, it was not dedicated until Sunday, March 21, 1926. At the dedication, the sermon was preached by Bishop Warren A. Candler, D.D.

The pastors of the present church, from the time of Dr. Hardin, have been as follows:

1919-24 Clovis G. Chappell, D.D. The new church was occupied during his term. The auditorium was too small to hold the crowds which came to hear him.

1924-30 W. A. Lambeth, D.D. Dr. Lambeth added over one thousand members to the church.

1930-32 W. A. Shelton, D.D.

1932-34 Forney Hutchinson, D.D.

1934-36 W. Angie Smith, D.D.

1936 Dr. John W. Rustin.

I heard all of them preach.



The Assistant Pastors for the corresponding period were:

M. Leo Rippley—Jan. 1920-Nov.. 1924.

W. A. McKee—Apr. 1925-Oct. 1927.

John W. Rustin—Oct. 1927-Oct. 1928.

H. R. Deal—Oct. 1928-Oct. 1932.

Owing to my first wife's connection with this church from the early '70's until 1926, and also on account of the numerous family connections with the church since 1850, I will relate some anecdotes of the family.

My first wife's grandparents, Nathan Edmonston and his wife, Rebecca Follin, lived at 826 Ninth Street, between H and I Streets. My father-in-law was born in that house in 1839.

Nathan Edmonston led the great fantastic parade up Pennsylvania Avenue at the close of the War of 1812. The marchers were armed with brooms, rakes, hoes and the like. He was afterward a volunteer in the War with Mexico.

Mrs. Edmonston was a daughter of John Follin, who had been born near Falls Church, Virginia, and was a sailor in the Revolutionary War, sailing from Alexandria. In the Revolutionary section of Arlington Cemetery, John Follin's grave is marked by what is probably the best Revolutionary stone in the vicinity of Washington. It is a five-ton red granite stone, with a large bronze plaque on one side.

The son of Nathan Edmonston and his wife was Gabriel Edmonston, my first wife's father. He became the first general President of the Brotherhood of Carpenters of the United States and Canada. He was one of the organizers of the American Federation of Labor. He introduced the 8-hour-day resolution in the Federation in 1890, and carried it to success. The 8-hour day was afterward adopted by the United States Government.



In the Edmonston family, there were four daughters and two sons. Of the two sons, Enoch was in the Union Army and Gabriel in the Confederate Army. It was truly a Civil War. Gabriel Edmonston was the color bearer for Mahone's Brigade, Longstreet's Corps, in General Lee's army, and in the battle of Antietam he led the charge on Bloody Lane, or Sunken Road, where the dead lay five and six deep. Mr. Edmonston was wounded twice, at Antietam and Malvern Hill. He was captured four times, and each time made his escape. He escaped from the old Capitol Prison.

Mr. Edmonston had the second automobile in Washington. It was a Locomobile, run by steam. I remember going with Mr. Edmonston to see the first automobile in Washington. It was in a stable in an alley, east of Fourteenth Street and north of K Street. At that time, the early 1900's, one could not purchase over a quart of gasoline at a drug store in the city, and none could be purchased out in the country. An electric and gasoline machine could not leave town. The leading steamers of the day were the White, Stanley, McKay and Locomobile.

Mr. Edmonston conceived the idea of an automobile trip to Frederick, Hagerstown, Winchester and Staunton. I accompanied him. It was the first automobile that ever went up the Valley of Virginia. Farmers in the towns, doing their trading, would ask us: "When are you coming back? I want to bring my family to town to see you go through."

Gabriel Edmonston was the author of a fine book, entitled "A Genealogical History of the Follin Family in America." His third wife, Mrs. Roberta Edmonston, is now an attendant of Mount Vernon Place Church, and



her cousin, Henry G. Thomas, is the present Treasurer of the Church. Wilson L. Thomas, another cousin, is a member of the Board of Trustees.

I close my eyes, and I can plainly see James W. Barker and Isaac W. Busey, both tall, elderly gentlemen, passing slowly up the aisles of Mount Vernon Place Church, taking the offering, as was their wont for many, many years.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER MILLER.

911 Monroe St., N. W.

